

TOWN OF STOW  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
AND INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION

Minutes of the August 27, 2015 Economic Development and Industrial Commission Meeting

**Members Present:** Tom Farnsworth, Rich Eckel, Serena Howlett and Bob Collings

Tom Farnsworth called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm

**APPOINTMENTS**

Celeste Versoi, Resident and Business owner, met with the Commission. Celeste explained that she is interested in working with the committee and offered some ideas such as:

- Set up a web based link
- Sponsor events to cross promote businesses
- Ask the Stow Independent if they would like to sponsor an event
- Create an inventory

Celeste said the Commission should convey its intent and purpose and set up opportunities to involve businesses. She also noted that the Commission should consider a plan where you leverage what is around Stow, and to create a database of artisans in and nearby Stow.

Celeste also noted that the EDIC Website needs to be fixed. She could not download the minutes.

Celeste is very interested in serving on the Commission as an Associate Member. Karen Kelleher said that she will be added to the distribution list and that the next agenda can include an action item to appoint her.

**ANDREW CURTIS, CURTIS SEPTIC**

Andrew Curtis of Curtis Septic, 128 Great Road, met with the Commission to seek support of his proposals to amend the zoning bylaw to allow a residence above a ground floor retail/office establishment.

Mr. Curtis explained that his original plan for the property was to have an office for his Northborough Business in Stow. He has a tenant in the main Building (Bright Cleaners) on the first floor of the main building and has been trying to rent office space on the second floor or in the smaller building where his (Curtis Septic) office is. He noted that his property is surrounded by vacancy signs. He invested \$110,000.00 in upgrades to the property and is now in financial hardship because he cannot rent the space. He has reduced the rent to \$500.00 and \$600.00 per month and still can't find a tenant.

Mr. Curtis reached out to a Real Estate Broker who advised that there is no market for office space and advised that the only market that is available is residential. Therefore he is seeking a letter of support from the Commission to amend the Bylaw to allow a residence on the second floor of his building.

Tom Farnsworth noted that Maynard and Acton allow mixed use and noted that mixed use is typical of village type business districts. He feels it makes for a vibrant village community. Mr. Curtis said the key is to not have vacant space throughout the area.

Karen Kelleher advised that the Planning Board plans to bring forth zoning amendments for the Business District which will include a mixed use component, but not until Spring. Mr. Curtis said he cannot wait until Spring - noting that his ground floor tenant (Bright Cleaners) is not doing well. He had to reduce their rent by 50% in order to keep them there for a while. He also noted that it doesn't help that the whole block is struggling and full of vacancy signs.

Bob Collings said he would be interested to hear why Stow is not as successful as other small communities.

There was some discussion as to why Bright Cleaners is not as successful in Stow as they have other locations that are very successful. It was suggested that there are already two well established dry cleaners in Stow.

Bob Collings said he is all for flexibility in the bylaw, but is concerned about unintended consequences by allowing residences due to the education cost for school children. It was noted that it is not likely there would be any or many children in this type of residence.

***Tom Farnsworth moved to send a letter of support for a Zoning Bylaw amendment for mixed development in the business district by allowing a residence above a ground floor retail/office establishment. The motion was seconded by Bob Collings and carried by a unanimous vote of four members present (Tom Farnsworth, Rich Eckel, Serena Howlett and Bob Collings).***

## **SURVEY**

Rich Eckel noted that the average response to a survey is after noticing it 7 times. It was agreed to send a final email reminder about the survey indicating that the survey will be closing on October 1.

## **SIGN BYLAW**

Members discussed the sign bylaw. Some questioned whether or not signs on private property should be regulations. Serena suggested that signs within a site (on private property) should be regulated by the owner rather than the Town.

It was noted that directional signs should be more generous as to size in order to be effective, as the purpose is for people driving through town to see the signs. The size of directional signs is too small for drivers to read without creating a safety hazard.

It was also noted that the bylaw allows for much larger seasonal agricultural signs, which is the result of the farming community providing input. It was noted that the bylaw is favorable toward agricultural because it is seasonal.

Members also questioned the reasoning why window signs are restricted to 30% - there doesn't seem to be any rationale.

Bob Collings noted that, in working with the public safety department for temporary directional signs, he found that he was limited to no more than 10 signs which is problematic. Safety should be the main criteria.

It was also noted that the limitation on the size of a plaza (pylon) sign is also problematic.

It was noted that internally illuminated signs should be limited.

Members agreed observe signs in other communities and to review the bylaw in more detail in preparation of the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Kelleher  
Town Planner